**Writer’s Workshop**

1. **Introduction/Workshop Outline**

This section will focus primarily on Writer’s Workshop. I’d like to talk about how it is different than “Traditional” writing instruction, its key features, opposition to this approach, and organization. While we’re doing this I’d like to have a continuing conversation about what is currently happening in our own classrooms in regards to writing, and how this fits or doesn’t fit here at Carlisle.

*Response Writing*: What is your personal history as a writer? Were there any landmark moments that changed how you write? How did you get to where you are today *as a writer*?

1. **Two Approaches to Writing Instruction**

In her book Making the Journey, Leila Christenbury distinguishes between two disparate approaches in the pedagogy of writing, what she terms the “traditional” approach and a “new model of teaching writing” (213). She says, “The teacher in the traditional model controls, determines, and judges all: he or she makes the assignment, sets up the relatively unvarying structure, and is the sole responder to and evaluator of the writer” (213). This approach focuses on a highly structured, teacher focused methodology.

For Example:

[My teacher] espoused what she termed the Keyhole Approach to organization, illustrated here.

The inverted triangle represented the introduction, which began broadly but which culminated in the specific thesis statement listing the three points. It was always placed at the end of the first paragraph. The three blocks represented the three paragraphs that made up the body of the paper—one paragraph for each point. The first sentence of each paragraph identified the point to discuss, and the last sentence provided some kind of transition into the next point. The final triangle illustrated the conclusion, as it began with a restatement of the thesis and then grew more general

As you can imagine, such a strict form can be confining, and this form spawned such thrillers as “Three Benefits of Reading” (an actual student paper—mine). It produced lifeless, predictable prose, and a safe outline to follow forevermore. But this outline did make me see the need for a clear sense of organization in writing, and made me aware of the moves I was making as a writer…. However, for the longest time I didn’t realize that the Keyhole Approach *wasn’t* the best idea *all* the time. I had decided that, since it always worked for me (those hideously boring essays earned me A’s), it would work all the time. So, for a while at least, I wrote uninspired papers limited to three main points and one-paragraph introductions and conclusions. –Connie Chantelau (as quoted in *Making the Journey* 212)

Conversely, instead of a linear approach to writing—controlled by the teacher from the top down, from topic, to draft, to revision, to product—the “New Model” which Christenbury touts is recursive and student driven.

We think real writing looks something more like this, with the “steps” going forward and backward and forward:

The implications for us as teachers are serious; we cannot spend Monday getting ideas, Tuesday writing, Wednesday revising, and Thursday editing. If we put students on such a schedule, even in the name of process writing, we are not truly letting students explore or use their recursive process.

We need to help students get started and then give them time to use and develop their own patterns for working through drafting to a final (or somewhat final) version. They may be getting ideas on Wednesday and Thursday, writing on Friday and Sunday, and getting more ideas on Monday. If we believe that writing is truly recursive, we create a schedule that allows for that recursiveness. This does not mean we abandon our students and give them three days to figure it out for themselves; we need to help them during this time and by using a *workshop format*. (216, emphasis added).

*Response Writing*: What do you know about Writer’s Workshop? What does writing instruction in your classroom look like?

1. **Writer’s Workshop Booktalk**

Writer’s workshop has come up in almost every Teaching Writing book that I’ve read. Here’s what they say:

Writing to Persuade – Karen Caine – Students will learn to write persuasively if they have a chance to select their own topics, learn persuasive techniques a few at a time, write often, and receive both student and teacher feedback on their work. The best way to do this is to use a writing workshop approach to teaching writing.

Write Beside Them – Penny Kittle – I won’t be ruled by tests I don’t believe in. I won’t be told how to teach writing by people who never write. My students and I are the most powerful forces in my classroom, not the tests. I’m learning every day, every class, with every student. They still drive my teaching, planning, and thinking. I’ve heard lots of ideas on how to teach writing, seen plenty of curriculum guides and model writing units to transplant to the copy machine, but for all of those experts, I’m still the one who knows my students best…Each day I just try to get a little closer to what my students need. We wrestle with writing together in a high school writing workshop.

The Reading/Writing Connection – Carol Booth Olson – In a workshop approach, students self-select the texts they write and work independently at their own pace while collaborating with peers and their teacher on their visions and revisions of texts under construction…

In the Middle and Lessons that Change Writers– Nancie Atwell – lists the blueprints of her classroom’s workshop approach, how to get it started, how to manage it once it is started, and even step by step mini-lessons.

1. **3 Key Pieces to Writer’s Workshop**

1. Student Choice

Over and over again, research suggests that the more ownership students have over their writing, the better their writing will be:

It has been my experience that students write a whole lot better when they care about what they are writing. I have also found that they are much more likely to care about what they are writing when they are given choice in writing topics. Choice generates a welcome chain reaction: it creates student buy-in, which in turn generates writing motivation, which in turn causes students to write better.

-Gallagher, *Teaching Adolescent Writers* p. 91

However, like Donald Graves suggests, “Unlimited choice is no choice at all.” If students have absolute freedom over what to write, we are often likely to receive poorly conceived and poorly written essays. At the same time, we’re also expected to teach *specific* content, such as literary analysis essays, informational and persuasive compositions, research reports, and many other discourses. How do we balance student choice with curriculum and standards?

Kelly Gallagher advocates that we “…work students into the required discourses slowly by designing writing assignments that allow for *partial* student choice” (92, emphasis added).

Penny Kittle takes this thinking further by giving students complete authority on topic, but focusing them in terms of the genre they are working in.

2. Large Amounts of Time Devoted to Writing

Quickwrites – short, frequently occurring writing that is “Play” or “Low-risk”

Rules

1. Write the entire time (this helps build writing stamina)
2. Ignore your inner critic, just write
3. Relax, have fun, play

Quickwrite Exercises – Jigsaw Activity

1. Response to poetry
2. Response to a model text, especially a provoking text – e.g., Article of the Week
3. Collaborative Notebooks – like hard copy message boards, 30 different student selected topics
4. Complaint Box – list what bugs you, write on one topic <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/complaint-box-public-grooming/>
5. Question Everything – “myth of the boring topic,” 30 dollar bills or other random objects

Workshop Time – The bulk of your period should be devoted to allowing writers to continue work on an extended piece.

Writers need work time. We need to understand what work time looks like: time to think, sketch, write, read, reread, scratch out, delete, cut and paste, stand up and walk around, ask a friend, get frustrated, and just get space from the writing piece. But this time cannot all be tossed into “homework.” We know what most teenagers’ lives look like outside of school: Many of my students do not have, or will not take, thirty minutes of quiet time at night to consider topics. In a classroom, this time allows students to fumble around a bit considering choices. It was just like Atwell said about reading, if we don’t make time for it during the school day, then it won’t happen for many of our students. If we value something enough, we’ll make time for it (Kittle 82).

3. What the Teacher Does

Conferences – meets with individual or small groups of students to read work and give feedback

Mini-Lessons – after seeing student writing, conducts 5-20 minute lessons on grammar, craft, etc.

Writes and Models – breaks out the overhead projector and actually models his process in the writing.

*Response Writing*: What problems do you see with this method? How would this work in your classroom? How does this fit in with everything we are expected to teach (curriculum)?

1. **Against the “New” Model – Lisa Delpit, *Other People’s Children***

Read Article – “Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator”

*Response Writing*: Delpit appears to be suggesting that students, especially from socioeconomically disadvantaged households, need *more* structure not less. Do you agree? What does your experience say?

1. **Structure** 
   1. How the period is organized

Kittle’s schedule

* + - 1. Daily Agenda
      2. SSR
      3. Quickwrites and notebook work
      4. Minilesson
      5. Writing Workshop
      6. Closing (sharing good writing)

* 1. The Writer’s Notebook (from Gallagher 40)

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| **Pages** | **Section Title** | **Purpose** |
| 1-3 | Table of Contents | Students keep track of all mini-lessons taught so they can refer to them at a glance. |
| 4-10 | What Should I Write? | In this section students leave pages where we will do a number of brainstorming activities for those times when they claim they have nothing to write. |
| 10-12 | Writing/Literary Terms | These pages are where students write key writing and literary terms and their definitions. If they forget what ‘discourse’ or ‘irony’ means, for example, they refer to these pages. These terms are gradually added as we progress through the year. |
| 13 | Spelling Demons | Students keep these pages open to track their personal spelling demons |
| 14-40 | Craft | This section is reserved for “craft” mini-lessons. “Craft” is defined as those things good writers do (e.g., writing an effective introduction or combining sentences to gain more rhythm). |
| 41-65 | Editing | This section is reserved for editing mini-lessons. Editing lessons focus on mistakes writers make (e.g., run-on sentences or improper citations). |
| 66+ | Writing | This is the heart of the writer’s notebook. Much like the artist’s easel or the hoopster’s gym, this is where the writer plays with writing on a daily basis |

* 1. Student Writer’s Notebook Examples

*Response Writing*: Evaluate the Writer’s Notebook. Would this work in your classroom? Do you already have a similar organizational technique?

1. **Lesson/Curriculum planning**

How could you rework your classroom to reflect some of the practices shared today?